



FRANKISH ART

IN AMERICAN COLLECTIONS

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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KATHARINE REYNOLDS BROWN

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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On the cover: Fig. 12. Pair of bow fibulae. France. 6th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.191.172,173)

Frontispiece: Fig. 16. Openwork plaque. Wanquetan. Second half of 7th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.192.163)

The wealth of Frankish objects in American collections provides a comprehensive picture of the character of Frankish art from its inception in the Late Roman era through its metamorphosis into Carolingian art. The Frankish holdings of The Metropolitan Museum of Art—in particular the magnificent J. Pierpont Morgan collection—are in themselves sufficient to demonstrate all the elements necessary for an understanding of Frankish art and how it led to Carolingian and later medieval art. The Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore also has a fine collection of Frankish art. Smaller American collections, too, each play a role in defining the complex nature of Frankish art. This publication will provide the first survey ever of American museum holdings in Frankish art.

FRANKISH ART: THE PATH TO CAROLINGIAN ART

The Franks—one of the Barbarian Germanic peoples of the great migratory period of the fifth to seventh centuries A.D.—provided the essential link between Late Roman art and the Carolingian art that laid the groundwork for the splendid metalwork of the medieval period. From what survives of Frankish art, consisting largely of personal adornments and objects for daily use, we know that it drew upon many sources.

The art of the early Frankish period combined many aspects of Late Roman minor arts with those of the portable arts of other migratory Germanic tribes, primarily that of the Ostrogoths. These objects consisted chiefly of ornamented weapons, buckles, and jewelry that a warrior and his wife carried on their persons. The Late Roman and Gothic character of early Frankish art was gradually permeated by other Germanic artistic traditions and also by ideas and practices from the Christian East, primarily from Egypt and Syria via the Mediterranean, but also including both Byzantine and Langobardic influences from northern Italy. The British Isles contributed Hiberno-Saxon as well as, indirectly, East Christian traditions to the Franks. It was the synthesis of all these influences—achieved by Frankish craftsmen—that later gave birth to Carolingian art.

The Franks emerged in the first and second centuries A.D. as a consolidation of small tribes inhabiting the forests between the Weser and Rhine rivers—the frontier of the western Roman Empire at the height of its power. By the mid-third century—probably as early as the second century—larger groups of them began to establish themselves as *foederati*, auxiliary troops guarding the borders of the Roman Empire.¹ The Frankish migrations continued during the following century, spreading into western areas of northern Roman Gaul—the area today shared by France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland.

While the rise of the Franks probably seemed inconsequential to the Romans when compared to that of some other Germanic tribes advancing westward between the fourth and seventh centuries, their growing prominence had a profound and permanent effect on the political structure and consequently the history of western Europe. The Franks alone among the migratory peoples established a political unity that survived the disintegration of the Roman Empire and laid the foundations of the Carolingian Empire. This political unity was largely the achievement of King Clovis I (reigned 481–511), who defeated Syagrius, the Roman patrician ruling central Gaul in 486 and who married the Burgundian Princess Clotilda in 493.² She converted him to orthodox Christianity (the belief in the Trinity), which won him the goodwill and support of the orthodox majority of the Gallo-Roman population against his powerful neighbors, the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Burgundians, all of whom adhered to Arianism (a belief in only one divinity, God, and a denial of the consubstantiality of Christ). Further support for Frankish rule in Gaul came from Constantinople when the eastern emperor Anastasius granted Clovis an honorary consulship in 508.³ The Franks also had close contacts with the Langobards, who had supplanted the Ostrogoths in Italy in 568. So strong, in fact, were these ties that Charlemagne, just before becoming emperor in the West in A.D. 800, assumed the title “king of the Franks and Langobards.”⁴

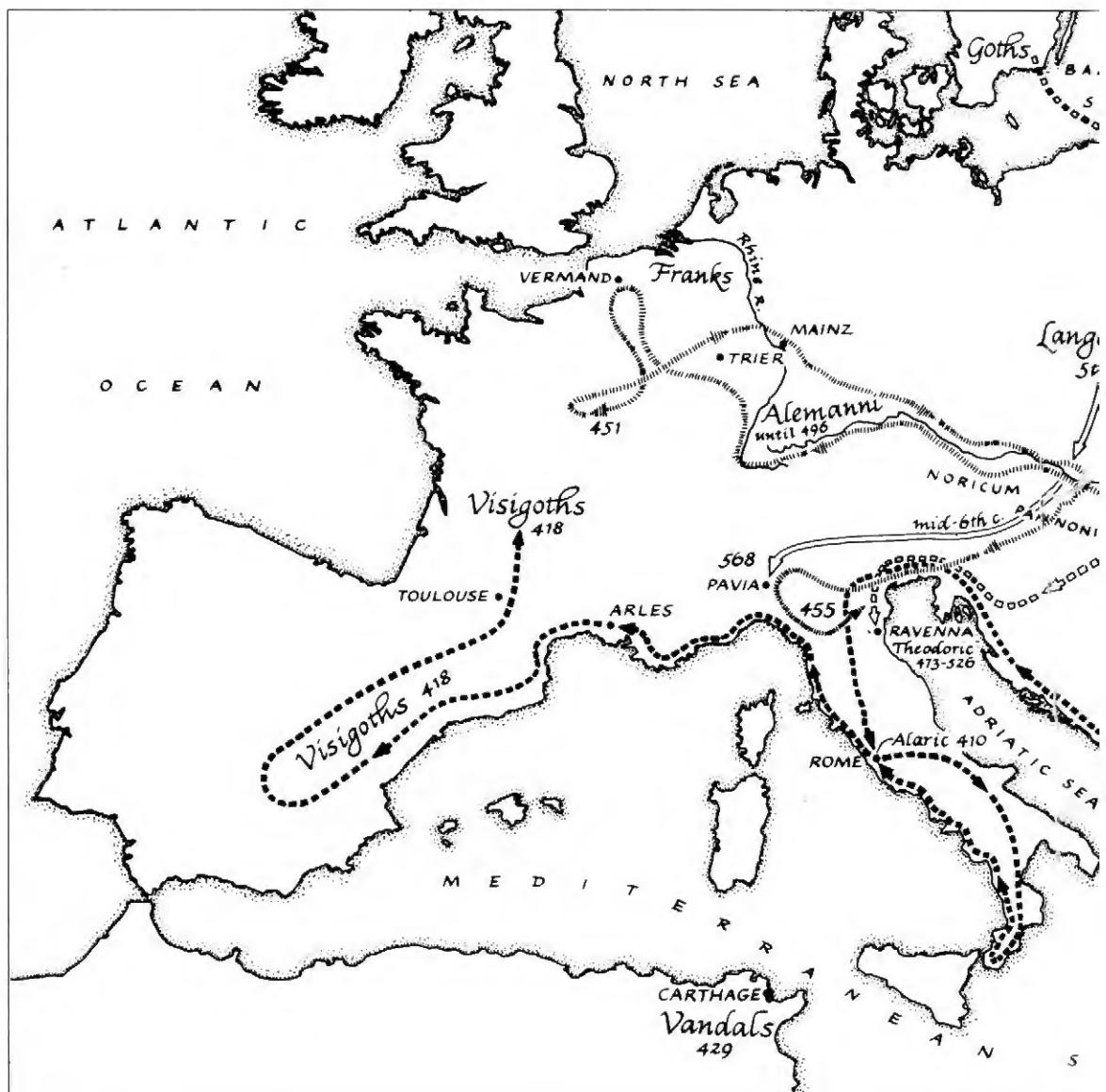
THE ROMAN LEGACY

The Roman roots of Frankish art can be seen in some basic techniques of craftsmanship and in some formal devices that the Franks perpetuated. The Romans introduced the art of glassmaking into western and northern Europe. Roman Gaul and the Rhineland were well-known areas of glass production, and remains of Roman workshops have been found in Belgium and the Netherlands. Frankish glass, although inferior to the Roman product, continued many techniques and forms of Roman glassmaking.⁵ Like most Roman glass, all Frankish glass was blown. A light blue glass Frankish cup from the Morgan collection (Fig. 1) has the same everted rim, sloping sides, and convex base as Roman cups do. Such cups are often called “palm cups” because their convex bottoms prevent them from standing by themselves, and they have to be held in the palm of the hand.⁶ Cups like these are usually found in Frankish graves, and they are widely represented in western European museums. The Metropolitan Museum and the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York, each has several examples, and the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio has a single cup.

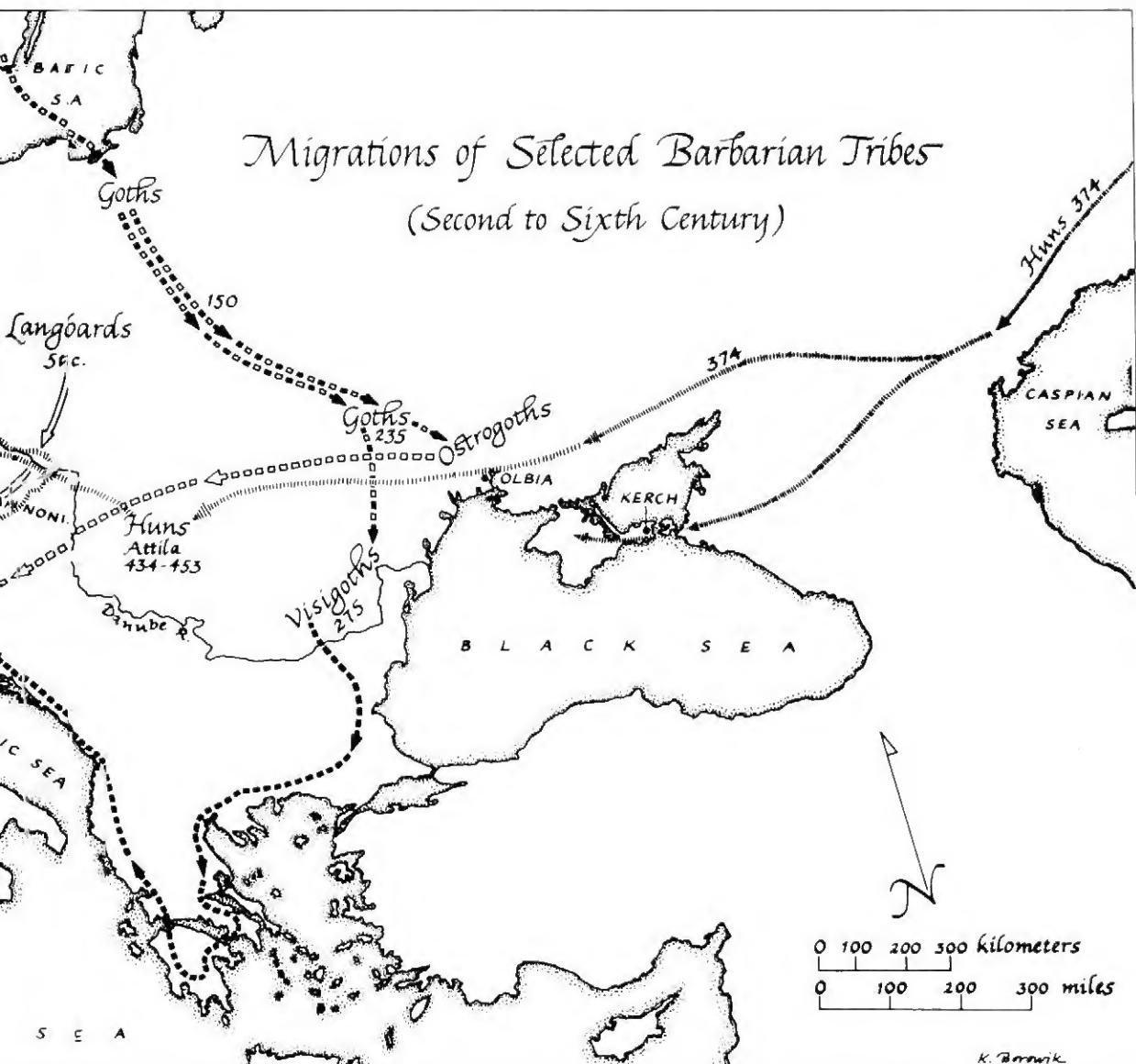
The Roman legacy is again evident in Frankish jewelry. Classical intaglios are often mounted in the bezels of Frankish finger rings, and many bezels consist of glass or glass paste in imitation of the precious stones used by the Greeks and Romans. Certain designs of filigree—such as the S-shaped pattern and the design that suggests eyes and a nose—were preserved as well. This eyes-and-nose design flanks an antique gem on a famous gold ring from the Krefeld-Gellep excavation. Renate Pirling suggests that the ring is the product of a Roman workshop taken over by Frankish craftsmen.⁷

Triangles formed by granulation were also continued by Frankish craftsmen following their Roman predecessors. Among the isolated finds in the Merovingian tombs at the “Vieux Cimetière” in Arlon, Belgium, excavated by H. Roosens, is a gold ring whose bezel is flanked by granulation applied to form triangles. Although this isolated find cannot be definitely dated, Roosens, like Pirling, suggests that the Franks continued to work in the Late Roman style through the fifth and into the late sixth century.⁸ The context in which a ring with similar triangular patterns of granulation was found at Bioul, Belgium, places it in the seventh century, indicating that the period of Roman influence extended into that century.⁹ Even on the large gold disk fibulae or brooches, which were the most characteristic creations of seventh-century Frankish goldsmiths’ work, the same designs of filigree were continued. The Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts has an excellent example (Fig. 2).¹⁰ The bronze brooch covered with gold and set with pieces of glass and semiprecious stones preserves in the filigree of the interstices both the design suggesting eyes and a nose—unfortunately, two of the three are broken—and a loose interpretation of the “S” motif.

One of the finest examples of a gold Frankish ring decorated with granulation forming a triangular pattern is a ring of unknown provenance now in the Yale University Art Gallery (Fig. 3). Not only is the bezel flanked by beads of granulation set in triangular patterns, but the bezel itself is decorated with similar beaded triangles. Whereas the rings discussed above all present the massive Roman form with the bezel embedded in the band, the Yale bezel was made separately and applied to the band; in addition,



Migrations of Selected Barbarian Tribes (Second to Sixth Century)



the band is narrower than the bezel. These characteristics are found on many forms of Roman rings, but they typify Frankish rings. The red glass in the bezel, imitating a garnet, is another salient feature of Frankish rings. On the other hand, the imitation beading around the base of the bezel is a tradition apparently of Frankish invention. A somewhat comparable ring excavated at Cobern on the Mosel River and now in the Bonn Museum is described in terms of Late Roman techniques that were adopted by the Franks.¹¹ The band is not as narrow as that of the Yale ring and the bezel not as high. Moreover, the two are not separate entities, as they are in the Yale ring. These comparisons suggest that the ring in Bonn is a transitional piece dating to the first half of the fifth century, whereas the Yale ring can be placed in the second half of the fifth or early sixth century.

THE GOTHIC LEGACY

The other primary component of Frankish art is the art of the Ostrogoths. The Goths migrated from Scandinavia to the northern shores of the Black Sea in the early third century A.D. When in 374 the Huns, probably coming from the steppes of Central Asia, invaded the southern plains of Russia, some of the Ostrogoths (or eastern Goths) remained under Hunnish domination, and others fled westward into Italy. By the end of the fifth century Theodoric the Great reigned in Ravenna (491–526).¹² Some of these Ostrogoths continued to move to the north and west, and probably a few of the artisans were employed by the Frankish court.

When the Goths first arrived on the northern shores of the Black Sea in the third century, they found a highly refined goldsmith's art making use of stone inlay that had long flourished in such Greek colony cities as present-day Kerch and Olbia. The Goths were so taken with the combination of garnets and gold that gold studded with garnets became a hallmark of their exquisite metalwork.¹³ To enhance the brilliance of the garnets, small pieces of thin gold foil, either plain or hatched, were often put under the translucent stones. All these aspects of metalwork the Goths later transmitted to the Franks.¹⁴

To their new home in south Russia the Goths brought their own forms of jewelry, which were also eventually passed on to the Franks. The small Gothic bow fibulae (pins) found in south Russia, which date to the late second and early third centuries, are characterized by a semicircular head with three digits, a rhomboid foot plate with a slight median ridge, and an arched bow connecting the two. The type is exemplified by a pair in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 4). In the fourth century such fibulae became larger and more elaborate, but the basic form never changed.¹⁵

Among the many aspects of their own metalwork and that of the cultures of south Russia that the Goths transmitted to the Franks were the form of the bow fibula, the motif of birds' heads, and the predilection for inlaid almandines (a variety of garnet), or red glass, often set with pieces of gold foil underneath. Scholars are not in agreement about how the Goths transmitted these aspects of their art to the Franks. Some think the Frankish court employed Gothic goldsmiths from south Russia; others believe the Goths simply carried the influences westward.¹⁶ Probably both occurred. Consequently, it is not always possible to distinguish between early Frankish

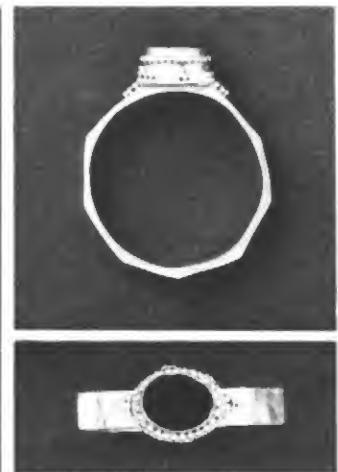


Fig. 1. Cup. Glass. 5th–7th century
H. 5.7 cm. (2 1/4 in.), gr. diam. 10.2 cm. (4 in.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.193.339)

Fig. 2. Brooch. Bronze, gold, pearl,
glass, semiprecious stones
Second half of 7th century. Diam. 4 cm. (1 1/16 in.)
Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts, 1949.45

Fig. 3. Ring. Gold, red glass
Second half of 5th century or early 6th century
Max. diam. 2.7 cm. (1 1/16 in.)
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. G. Evelyn Hutchinson,
1959.43.20

and Gothic craftsmanship. In fact, the Yale ring could be the product of an Ostrogothic goldsmith working for a Frankish patron.

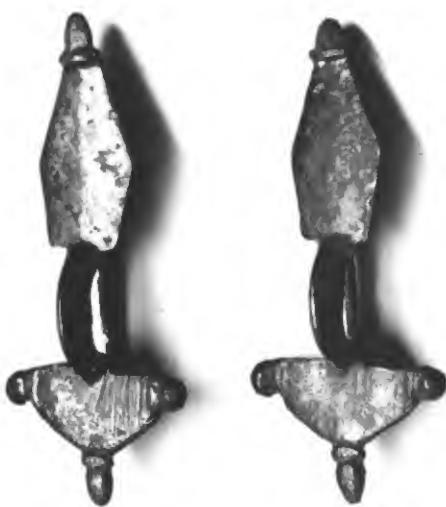
An excellent example of a sixth-century Frankish bow fibula in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (Fig. 5), further illustrates the artistic connection between the Goths and the Franks. A semicircular head plate is connected by an arched bow to a foot, now rectangular in shape. The median is still emphasized, this time with incised dots. Instead of three digits, the head now has five, each set with red glass paste. (The present foot is an accurate replacement of the original, which was broken off.)¹⁷ The borders of the bow and foot and the entire surface of the head display a technique known as "chip carving" because of its resemblance to wood carving. Most scholars think this technique was developed along the borders of the Rhine and the Danube rivers,¹⁸ but others believe that different types of chip carving originated in many locations and later came to be practiced in these frontier regions of the Roman Empire.¹⁹ Such surface decoration is an integral part of the traditional Frankish bow fibula. They were cast in clay molds, some of which have come down to us.

Fibulae cast in the shape of birds and set with cloisonné garnets or red glass were developed in south Russia about A.D. 400 and were extremely popular among the Franks until the second half of the sixth century.²⁰ A bronze-gilt pair (Fig. 6), each with its entire surface covered with red glass cloisonné inlay, its eye consisting of a pearl and its collar of mica, is one of the most beautiful examples in existence. The Metropolitan Museum is indeed fortunate to have acquired it from J. Pierpont Morgan. Small disk fibulae with the entire surface set with cloisonné garnets or red glass are among the most characteristic types of sixth-century Frankish jewelry. A rare and exquisite large brooch in the shape of a fish, also entirely set with cloisonné garnets or red glass, is currently on loan anonymously to the Cleveland Museum of Art.²¹

THE J. PIERPONT MORGAN COLLECTION IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

The objects discussed above, which exemplify the Late Roman and Gothic origins of Frankish art, are only a few of the significant Frankish examples of art in American museums today. By far the most important collection is that of J. Pierpont Morgan, which was bequeathed to The Metropolitan Museum of Art by Morgan's son in 1917. A trustee in 1888 and president of the Museum in 1904, J. Pierpont Morgan had his most active period of collecting during the last decade of his life, which ended in Rome in 1913. In 1920 the trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art erected a tablet in the main hall in memory of the late benefactor, trustee, and president. Appropriately, this tablet now occupies a prominent position in the main vestibule.

Consisting of some 620 objects of personal adornment and a large number of objects used in daily life, the Morgan collection represents one of the greatest holdings of Gallo-Roman and Merovingian antiquities in the world. Not only is it one of the greatest, it was also one of the first, since not until the late nineteenth century did "barbarian art" capture the affections of the great art collectors.



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Fig. 4. Pair of bow fibulae. Silver
Provenance: Kerch, south Russia. Ca. A.D. 400
L. (each) 7.3 cm. (2 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Purchase, 1898 (98.11.107,108)

Fig. 5. Bow fibula. Bronze gilt, garnets
6th century. L. 8.9 cm. (3 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.)
Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 54.2444

Fig. 6. Pair of bird fibulae. Bronze gilt,
red glass paste, mica, pearls
Provenance: northern France. Ca. A.D. 550
H. (each) 3.8 cm. (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.191.164,165)

J.P. Morgan began collecting barbarian art probably at the turn of the century with purchases from the Paris dealer Stanislas Baron, a former wine merchant. The latter had acquired the bulk of his collection from Lelaurain, the excavator of thousands of Merovingian tombs throughout the 1880s in the north of France, chiefly in Picardy. To this collection Baron added his own purchases from the south of France and from the collection of M. Jumel in Amiens. Morgan, and ultimately The Metropolitan Museum of Art, reaped the benefit of Baron's energetic collecting.

Morgan enriched his collection with a significant purchase in Niedereisig, a village on the western bank of the Rhine between Coblenz and Bonn. The site had long been known for its Roman antiquities, but around 1900 the local postmaster, Queckenberg, excavated a large Frankish cemetery there. Following his death in 1909, his collection was offered for sale to several German museums, but was finally purchased by Morgan. Later additions forming the third part of the collection came from the Marne and Aube valleys.²²

Morgan's entire collection was published in three volumes, corresponding to the three purchases, by Seymour de Ricci in 1910 and 1911, but unfortunately only 150 copies were printed and these were circulated privately. Specific groups of objects have been included in specialized studies by Herbert Kühn and Gertrude Thiry. More recently Patrick Périn, Françoise Vallet, and Dorothée Renner have included objects from the Morgan collection in their specialized studies. A few pieces, such as the plaque from Hermès, have been extensively published, and others have been studied by William H. Forsyth and Vera K. Ostoia of the Metropolitan Museum. The most valuable and complete work was done about ten years ago by Stephen Foltny, who catalogued in four parts almost the entire Morgan prehistoric and migration collections in the Metropolitan Museum. Unfortunately, this manuscript is still unpublished. Since almost none of the Morgan material comes from scientifically excavated sites, and often even the site is unknown, each of these publications and studies is of great value in helping to place the objects in a meaningful context. It is hoped that, step by step, we will eventually achieve a comparable high level of knowledge for the collection as a whole.

The extraordinary value of the Morgan collection lies in the fact that, with the exception of ceramics, it contains a complete range, in type and general date, of objects of male and female attire as well as an impressive representation of portable objects for daily use. From women's tombs the collection contains beads, rings, earrings, openwork, disk-shaped plaques thought to have been worn hanging from the belt for the suspension of implements and other personal possessions, as well as bow-, bird-, and animal-shaped fibulae thought to have been worn in pairs. From men's tombs it presents cloisonné purse clasps and buckles as well as sword mounts. Its large damascened buckles and gold disk fibulae were apparently worn by both men and women. While the additions of astute curators and generous donors have greatly enhanced the Museum's collection of migration material in general, the Morgan collection of Frankish art—with one or two exceptions—required no additions. This is indeed a tribute to the pioneer collector.

THE WALTERS COLLECTION

Although the Baudon collection in the University of Illinois Museum, Urbana, is much larger than that of the Walters Art Gallery, the majority of the items have little artistic merit. Certainly in artistic quality the collection begun by Henry Walters in the late 1920s and early 1930s and now in the Walters Art Gallery is second only to the Morgan collection in the United States. Although William T. Walters, founder of the gallery, had no interest in these "primitive" items, his son Henry acquired a number of important barbarian pieces, including the famous Visigothic eagle fibulae, the Avaric gold cup, and a splendid group of Hunnish material.²³ From 1934 to 1952 the collection was significantly enlarged by the astute and energetic curator Marvin Chauncey Ross. Philippe Verdier and Richard Randall have been his enthusiastic successors. Although Frankish art is not the strongpoint of the Walters Art Gallery migration material, some very significant and interesting pieces are found in the collection, including an important range of buckles, several bow fibulae, a later round gold fibula decorated with cabochons, and two hairpins terminating in birds.

A SURVEY OF OTHER AMERICAN MUSEUMS' HOLDINGS

Other American museums also contain important objects from the Frankish period. Since no comprehensive listing of Frankish material currently exists, the following survey of important holdings in American museums should be of great value to the student of the period.

Some of the pieces illustrated and discussed here are comparable to others in other American collections, and consequently, the date and origin of the group can be established by comparisons with similar objects excavated in Europe. Some of the items are unique in this country, but can also be dated and localized by comparison with excavated material in Europe. Much of the material in European collections comes from nineteenth-century excavations that were not carried out scientifically, but it still helps to provide a place of origin for objects in American collections. Fortunately, many excavations are currently in progress, and the reports of these will permit us to continually widen our knowledge.

This survey may be of particular value to European scholars, who know little about American holdings in Frankish art because our publications are frequently not available to them. Even the Morgan collection is little known in Europe, since the de Ricci catalogue was published in such a limited edition. The scholarly catalogue of the migration art of the Walters Art Gallery also had a limited circulation, but the jewelry exhibition catalogue of that museum was more widely distributed.²⁴ The small but significant collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is far better known in Europe because its catalogue of the 1977 international exhibition *Romans and Barbarians* presented a good sampling of Roman and barbarian art in the United States. The holdings of the Worcester Art Museum were also made known through that catalogue. However, some important Frankish collections—

equal in importance to the ones represented in the Boston exhibition—were not included in the show. Among these were the holdings in the Cleveland Museum of Art²⁵ and the important pieces in the collection of the de Menil Foundation of Houston. A scholarly publication of the de Menil collection, which will include the Frankish pieces, is currently being prepared.

Since the Boston catalogue did not include glass works, the Frankish palm cup, bead, and game piece in the Toledo Museum of Art²⁶ and several palm cups and beakers at the Corning Museum of Glass are probably also unknown in Europe. Although the pin, buckle, and ring at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., are known to scholars abroad because they were included in the 1965 *Catalogue of Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities* by Marvin C. Ross,²⁷ the comb and ring at Yale remain virtually unknown. The entire Baudon collection in the University of Illinois Museum, Urbana, which is particularly strong in arms, buckles, and equal-arm fibulae, is as yet unpublished.

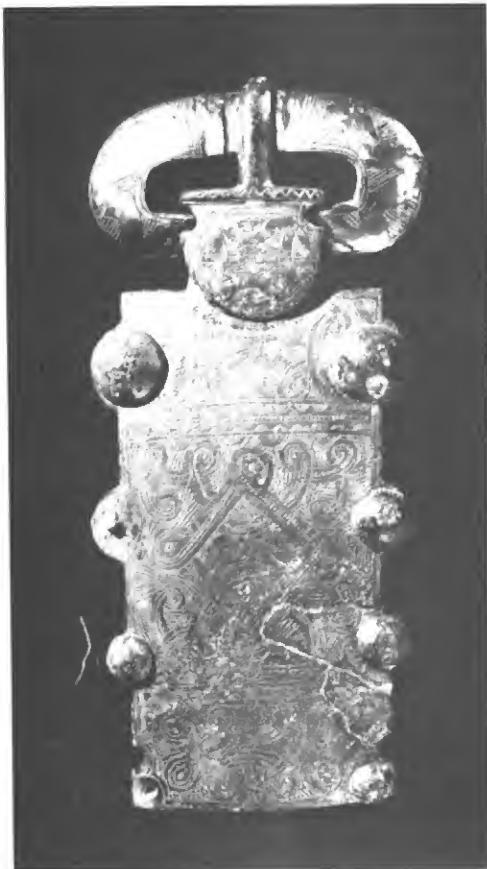
This survey of American holdings will first discuss groups of similar items in various American museums and then pieces that are unique in this country, but that can also be dated and/or placed by comparison with parallels in European collections.

A complete bronze buckle and plate and a plate from another buckle in the Walters Art Gallery, a buckle in the Metropolitan Museum, and another buckle in the Boston museum are all of the same general type.²⁸ The first three came to their museums from private collections, and the fourth was purchased from an art dealer. Consequently, none has a specific provenance or date. The Walters buckle is composed of a shield-shaped plate and an oval buckle (Fig. 7). From other examples of the type, we know that the section attaching the tongue to the plate—missing here—was also shield shaped. The plate has three bosses and three tangs for attachment to the strap on the reverse and is incised on the obverse with concentric bands of geometric ornament around a human face that is surmounted by a cross and is therefore thought to be the face of Christ. The fact that three similar examples excavated in France, on which the face is surmounted by a cross, have been found in the vicinity of churches that existed in Merovingian times (such as St.-Germain-des-Prés, where Christian sarcophagi have also been found) would seem to support this view.²⁹ On the second Walters example the face is not surmounted by a cross and has been variously interpreted as the face of the Germanic god Wotan and the face of Medusa, but perhaps most sensibly by Patrick Pépin as simply a human mask. Some of these buckles, like the one in the Metropolitan Museum, are silvered. While scattered examples of this type of buckle have been found throughout the Frankish region, Pépin has shown that the greatest concentration of the type has come to light in the west-central area of the Parisian basin. Six examples are in the Musée Carnavalet, which houses all the archaeological material found in the Paris region. All these examples fall into Pépin's Type A by their size, profile, and motif of four as opposed to three geometric bands surrounding the face. Two other variations of this type of buckle are in the Baudon collection. According to Pépin, these buckles can be dated to the last third of the sixth century and were probably all produced in the same workshop and possibly by a single Parisian artisan.³⁰

Another group of buckles represented in several American museums comes from the cemetery of Tabarie in Aquitaine. These have large rectangular plates, oval buckles, and shield-shaped sections attaching the



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Fig. 7. Plate; buckle and plate. Bronze
Last third of 6th century. L. 9.2 cm. (3 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.)
Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 54.2344-5

Fig. 8. Buckle. Silvered bronze
Provenance: Tabarieane, Aquitaine. 7th century
L. 18.1 cm. (7 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.)
Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 54.2350

buckle to the tongue. As illustrated by the example in the Walters Art Gallery (Fig. 8), they are made of silvered bronze, and buckle, plate, and base of tongue are decorated with engraved and pounced designs of interlaced strap-work.³¹ The designs are divided into compartments. Graduated bosses are on the obverse borders of the plate, and tangs for fastening the buckle to the wide, heavy belt are on the reverse. Such large buckles were worn by men and women alike in the seventh century. Marvin C. Ross suggested that the patterns are a local Frankish development of Late Roman motifs,³² and, when it is recalled that Aquitaine was the chief center of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy, his suggestion seems highly plausible. As Ross has noted, the Worcester Art Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and, of course, the Walters Art Gallery all possess examples from the site of Tabariene. Although there is no record of its provenance, a strikingly similar example is in the Dumbarton Oaks collection.³³

Among several pieces of traditional Frankish glass in the Toledo Museum of Art is a glass game piece that is apparently unique in the United States (Fig. 9). However, it recalls the fourth-century series of twenty-six such objects found in Grave 1215 at Gellep during the Krefeld-Gellep excavations and published by Renate Pirlung.³⁴ The Toledo piece is from Bingen, on the banks of the Rhine in the province of Hesse.

Another piece unique in this country but datable by similar examples in Europe is a bronze fibula in the form of a quadruped with a red glass paste eye, overlaid with gold and decorated with filigree of twisted gold wire (Fig. 10). Henry Walters purchased this piece, now in the Walters Art Gallery, from an unknown source, and its provenance is consequently not known.³⁵ Marvin C. Ross noted that it is similar to a pair of fibulae from Monceau-les-Bulles (Oise), the region directly north of Paris, but it is also similar to a pair from the cemetery of Jouy-le-Comte (Val d'Oise) published by Françoise Vallet and considered by her to have come from the same northern French workshop as those excavated at Monceau-les-Bulles.³⁶ Thus the Walters piece is probably one of yet another pair from this workshop. Its mate, as well as the mate to a fibula of similar workmanship and also in the Walters, but in the shape of a peacock, are in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest.³⁷ Because the filigree work on the pair from Jouy-le-Comte is extremely close to that on the handle of a sword from tomb number 1 at Andrésy (Seine et Oise) datable to the second quarter of the sixth century, Vallet concludes that the fibulae could not be much later, suggesting a date of 550–575.³⁸ Consequently, the Walters piece must also be of this date.

A pair of bird fibulae in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 11)³⁹ are thought to be contemporary products of this same workshop because of their similarity in technique: a gold plaque secured by rivets to a bronze base and decorated with filigree and glass paste. Each bird bears a fish in high relief in its center. The pair was found in Marchélepot (Somme), directly north of the Oise area, and the bronze base for a similar bird fibula was found at Chelles, in the Oise. Aside from the technical connections with the Oise, the Metropolitan bird fibulae form part of a group of pieces of jewelry from this area that all display a fish in the center in high relief: a buckle from Chelles, two others from different sites in the region, and a magnificent pair of bow fibulae from Jouy-le-Comte. Vallet has shown that excavations at other sites in the north of France and in Belgium have produced bird fibulae showing the same technique, with a raised oval section in the center, which



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*Fig. 9. Game piece. Gray transparent glass with opaque white trailed decoration
Provenance: Bingen, Hesse. 6th–7th century
Diam. 2.2 cm. (7/8 in.)
Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio*

*Fig. 10. Animal fibula. Bronze, gold, red glass paste
Third quarter of 6th century. L. 3.5 cm. (1 3/8 in.)
Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 57.571*

*Fig. 11. Pair of bird fibulae. Bronze, gold, red, and gray-blue glass paste
Provenance: Marchélepot (Somme). Third quarter of 6th century. H. (each) 3.8 cm. (1 1/2 in.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.192.175,176)*

can surely be interpreted as a degenerated fish motif. She has also demonstrated that all these pieces imitate Mediterranean gold work in technique, establishing a connection that permits a Christian interpretation for the fish.⁴⁰ Thus, the Metropolitan fibulae are important in that they come from a northern French workshop from which many products are known, all displaying in technique (and some in iconography) Mediterranean influences. They are also important because they are among the few examples of Frankish art in the United States that exhibit Christian symbols.

Two variations of bow fibulae that are unique in this country are found in the Metropolitan Museum. On one of these (Fig. 12) the foot terminates in an animal head, and the digits of the semicircular head represent birds' heads inlaid with almandine—a motif repeated on either side of the foot. The surfaces are decorated with geometric motifs in chip carving. Because several examples of this type were found at Champlieu, Kühn and Werner have named the variation the "Champlieu type." Another bow fibula named after its site is the "Krefeld type." This miniature bow fibula is in the shape of a cross with three knobs projecting from the head. On the Metropolitan Museum example (Fig. 13), the knobs are set with red glass or almandine, as is the knob terminating the foot. Like this example, most of these miniature fibulae are made of silver gilt decorated with chip carving and are approximately three centimeters long. Whereas most of the Frankish bow fibulae are derived from Ostrogothic prototypes, this type is clearly patterned after the Roman bow fibula. It may be dated to the fifth to sixth century.⁴¹

All the fibulae discussed above probably came from female graves, since, based on the finds to date, bow-shaped and animal-shaped fibulae were typical of women's accessories from the fifth through the end of the sixth century, when they were replaced by the large gold disk fibulae.⁴² As already noted, except for the large gold disk fibulae, they were worn in pairs. On the other hand, kidney-shaped cloisonné buckle plates, such as the magnificent example in red and green glass at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Fig. 14), have most often been found in chieftains' graves.⁴³ The Boston example is made of silver cloisons on an iron base, and we know from other examples that its buckle was either rectangular or oval and may or may not have been decorated in cloisonné as well. Although the Boston piece is the only example of a Frankish kidney-shaped buckle plate in America, a rectangular plate with its oval buckle exists in the Walters Art Gallery, and there are several oval and rectangular buckles without plates in the Metropolitan Museum.⁴⁴ One of the best parallels for the Boston example comes from the tomb of a military chief at the cemetery of Lavoye.⁴⁵ This type of buckle and plate is traditionally associated with the aristocracy and is found throughout the Frankish region from about 480–520.⁴⁶

Certain groups of objects are important because they indicate specific influences that are evident in Frankish art. Of the several handsome buckles in the Cleveland Museum, perhaps the most interesting is a silvered bronze openwork example showing two opposed orants in the center who share one body, each being menaced by a pair of confronted birds (Fig. 15). The birds' heads at the end of the buckle plate have two beaks. This representation and related Christian subjects such as Daniel in the Lions' Den were very popular on seventh-century buckles.⁴⁷ The Walters Art Gallery and the Metropolitan Museum have several such buckles with Christian representations. Many appliqués related to the Cleveland buckle showing opposed



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Fig. 12. Pair of bow fibulae. Bronze gilt and red glass
Provenance: northern France. 6th century.
H. 9.5 cm. (3 3/4 in.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.191.172,173)

Fig. 13. Miniature bow fibula. Silver gilt and red glass
Second half of 5th century. H. 3.1 cm. (1 1/4 in.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.192.173)

Fig. 14. Buckle. Iron, silver, red and green glass
Ca. A.D. 480-520. 4.5 x 4.2 cm. (1 3/4 x 1 5/8 in.)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 45.264

human masks surmounted by a two-headed dragon with menacing mouths have also been found in northern and northeastern Gaul.⁴⁸ A buckle of the same form and with the same representation as that on the Cleveland buckle is in the Museum of Laon, and, because of its stylization, has been placed in the eighth century.⁴⁹ The two buckles may have been made in the southwestern Frankish area. Whereas their openwork technique recalls the work on Roman buckles,⁵⁰ the flat two-dimensional figural representation of a Christian subject exemplifies the strong influence of the Christian East—an influence that was increasingly important in Frankish art in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Similar images and iconographic themes also abound on the openwork, disk-shaped plaques worn hanging from the belt for the suspension of implements and other possessions. Among the fifteen examples in the Metropolitan Museum collections, one deserves particular attention. This is the well-known plaque from Wanquetan (Pas de Calais) portraying a mounted figure (Fig. 16). The image is thought by most scholars to have been inspired by those of equestrian saints so popular in the Christian East.⁵¹ Whereas most such images show the rider bearing a lance, the Metropolitan Museum example shows him with a short sword suspended from his belt.

Animal motifs appeared in the art of all the migratory peoples including the Franks. Several Germanic tribes developed highly abstract animal styles during the sixth century. Sweden, Britain, and Lombard Italy are all candidates for the place of origin of the style, in which a knowledge of Coptic textiles must also have had its part.⁵² One of these styles, aptly called the “ribbon style,” is exemplified by the buckle and counter plate in the Boston museum (Fig. 17). Although the design in the center of the square dorsal is difficult to make out, it is probably a type of animal style other than the “ribbon style.” In the latter, the bodies of the animals are elongated and intertwined in a smooth, continuous, and usually symmetrical pattern. The dragon, which appears on the Boston piece, was the animal most frequently represented on such Frankish belt fittings. The Boston pieces are probably sixth century because of their small size and the clearly visible animal heads. On the much larger seventh- and eighth-century examples of this type of buckle, the design has become so abstract that the animal heads are no longer represented. Buckles and plates such as these were made by roughening the surface of the iron and then hammering a sheet of silver onto it. The design was cut into the base metal, and wires (in this case silver) were then hammered into the incisions. In spite of their large size, such buckles were worn by women as well as men.⁵³ The Walters Art Gallery has a magnificent example, and the Metropolitan Museum has an extensive collection.

From the beginning of the seventh century, Frankish women as well as men wore large gold disk fibulae either in pairs or alone. Such fibulae remained in vogue well into the Carolingian period, as is exemplified by the portrait of Emperor Lothaire (reigned 843–855) in his Gospels, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.⁵⁴ They were made of bronze covered with a sheet of gold or silver and decorated with filigree and precious stones or colored glass in raised settings. An example from Niederbreisig in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 18) represents a type found primarily in the lower Rhine region, dating to the second half of the seventh century.⁵⁵ The type is interesting because it shows both Langobardic and Byzantine influences. Inside a wreath of small beads and triangles is a raised central section inlaid with red and blue glass in the cloisonné technique. This central



15



16

Fig. 15. Buckle. Silvered bronze
Late 7th or early 8th century. 9.5 x 3.8 cm.
(3 3/4 x 1 1/2 in.)
Cleveland Museum of Art
Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic
Trust, 18.929

Fig. 16. Openwork plaque. Silvered bronze
Provenance: Wanquetan, Pas de Calais. Second
half of 7th century. H. 10.4 cm. (4 1/8 in.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.192.163)

section is surrounded in turn by gold cord forming two interlaced squares. Around the rim are raised settings filled with red and white glass. Filigree covers the interstices. The cloisonné work, the raised settings filled with colored glass, and the filigree are typical of this type of fibula throughout the seventh century, but it is the raised central section (the umbo) which places it in the second half of the seventh century.⁵⁶ The applied gold cord and the wreath of tiny beads (often pearls) are found on contemporary Langobardic fibulae, although the wreath of pearls comes ultimately from Byzantine goldsmiths, whose work was well known to the Langobards. This fibula thus offers yet another example of Mediterranean influence in Frankish art. Even among European collections no exact parallel for this piece has been found, but it must fall in the Type I⁴ of Bettina Thieme's classification of gold disk fibulae.⁵⁷

Contemporary with the large gold disk fibulae are the twin-armed fibulae, the majority of which are made of bronze (Fig. 19). Excavations lead us to believe that among the Franks, these were worn only by women. However, it is thought that the type evolved in northern France from those worn in Langobardic Italy by men. The nineteen examples from the Morgan collection, nine of them from Niederbreisig,⁵⁸ include several of the variants of the type, one of which would appear to be the prototype for the magnificent Carolingian silver pair from Muisen, Brabant. The latter were included in the exhibition devoted to the period of Charlemagne in Aachen in 1965.⁵⁹ It is the leaf decoration on the latter that distinguishes it from its late seventh- or early eighth-century Frankish prototype.

While the various Mediterranean influences examined thus far are the most important in Frankish art of the seventh and eighth centuries, it should be noted that by the late eighth century the Hiberno-Saxon style, which was carried by missionaries from the British Isles to all parts of Europe during the seventh and eighth centuries, became another important influence. However, with the exception of the highly intricate Hiberno-Saxon interlace, which can be seen, for example, on the Tassilo Chalice, in Kremsmünster, Austria, the influence of this style is most clearly seen in manuscripts, which are beyond the scope of the present work.⁶⁰

As missionaries encouraged the growth of the Church in the Frankish territories, it was a natural transition for Frankish secular artisans to begin to apply their skills to the service of the Church. The famous late eighth- or ninth-century Enger reliquary in Berlin (Fig. 20) exhibits most of the traditions evident in Frankish jewelry, such as garnet and glass paste inlay in gold cells, gems and glass paste settings mounted in gold (including a classical intaglio), a wreath of pearls around the central setting, and a flat, crude figure style on the silver-gilt reverse⁶¹ that recalls the style of the opposed figures on the Cleveland buckle.

In this survey of Frankish craftsmanship and goldsmith work in American collections, an overall picture of the character of Frankish art from its inception through its transition to Carolingian art has emerged. The Late Roman and Gothic character of early Frankish art was gradually permeated by other Germanic conventions as well as by ideas and practices from the Christian East. Although the latter came primarily from Egypt and Syria via the Mediterranean, they also came to the Franks by way of northern Italy and from the British Isles. Both Byzantine and Langobardic influences came from northern Italy, while East Christian as well as Hiberno-Saxon tradi-



17



18



19

Fig. 17. Buckle, dorsal, and counter plate

Iron, silver

6th century. L. (of buckle) 11.1 cm. (4½ in.); (of counter plate) 6 cm. (2⅔ in.); (of dorsal) 3.8 cm. (1½ in.)

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 59.969 a-c

Fig. 18. Brooch. Bronze, gold, red and blue glass, gold cord, red and white glass paste

Provenance: Niederbreisig. Second half of 7th century. Diam. 3.8 cm. (1½ in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.193.83)

Fig. 19. Twin-armed fibula. Bronze

Provenance: Niederbreisig. Late 7th to 8th century

L. 5.1 cm. (2 in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.193.276)

tions came from the British Isles. It was the synthesis of all these influences—achieved by Frankish craftsmen—that gave birth to Carolingian art. However small most American collections are, each can play a role in defining the complex nature of Frankish art. The resources of the Walters Art Gallery and certainly those of the Metropolitan Museum are sufficient to demonstrate all the elements essential to an understanding of the birth of Carolingian and later medieval art.



20

Fig. 20. Reliquary. Silver gilt, precious stones, gems, pearls, enamel cloisonné glass, and almandine inlay
Provenance: Enger, Westfalia, Germany
Early 9th century. H. 16 cm. (6 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.)
Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

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